

First record of American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* for Mauritania, and its status in western Africa

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Première mention du Pluvier bronzé *Pluvialis dominica* pour la Mauritanie, et son statut en Afrique de l'Ouest. Deux Pluviers bronzés *Pluvialis dominica* ont été observés et photographiés dans le Parc national du Diawling, au sud-ouest de la Mauritanie, le 26 février 2004. Ceci constitue la première donnée pour le pays et la 19^{ème} pour l'Ouest Africain, y compris le Maroc (voir Tableau 1).

On 26 February 2004, MT discovered two dark greyish-brown waders feeding actively within a loose flock of Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* which they resembled, on a muddy area close to the Senegal River in the Parc National du Diawling, Mauritania (16°22'N 16°25'E). On three occasions all of the birds flew a few metres, enabling upper- and underwing patterns to be studied. The two birds were identified as American Golden Plovers *P. dominica* in winter plumage. Age could not be determined, as no retained wing-coverts or tertials were visible, probably due to the distance. Observations were made from 17.30 until 18.00 hrs with 30x telescopes from a distance of 200–250 m in good light. The following description is based on field notes and a photograph (Fig. 1).

Description

Size, shape and general impression. Both birds resembled Grey Plovers but appeared smaller and darker brown. Their more graceful body shape, due to a combination of relatively long wings, long-legged appearance and erect posture, and their darker grey-brown plumage, made them easy to distinguish from the nearby Grey Plovers. In flight, their narrower and longer wings gave them an elegant appearance, compared to the rather massive silhouette of Grey Plover. The grey-brown underwings made them easy to pick out from the rest of the flock. They did not remind us of Golden Plovers *P. apricaria*, as the upperparts were brown with just a faint yellow cast, lacking any pure golden or yellow colours.

Head. The dark grey-brown crown contrasted with the brighter forehead and hindneck and the conspicuous broad white supercilium, which recalled Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*. The area

around the bill base was white. The lores and ear-coverts were black to dark grey-brown. The plain nape was slightly paler than the lores and ear-coverts. The hindneck colour was intermediate between those of the crown and forehead. The chin was the same pale grey-brown as the forehead. The birds therefore appeared grey-faced, with the dark crown producing a capped appearance.

Upperparts. The pale brown hindneck merged into the slightly darker but equally uniform mantle. The back, rump, tail and upperwings were as dark grey-brown as the crown, thus much darker than in the accompanying Grey Plovers, but with a yellow cast. The centres of the scapulars were dark brown with reddish-brown fringes; the wing-coverts were dark brown with paler brown fringes. No warm yellow tones were visible on the upperparts.

Underparts. The grey-brown throat and breast were darker than the rest of the underside. The flanks were also grey-brown, but seemed weakly streaked rather than plain, giving them a paler appearance. Belly and undertail-coverts were clean white. Compared with the Grey Plovers the entire underparts were darker. The difference in flank colour was especially conspicuous: white in Grey Plovers versus grey-brown in American Golden Plover.

Upperwing. In flight, only a slight pale wingbar at the base of the primaries could be observed on the otherwise very dark upperwing. The secondary-coverts appeared brighter than the 'hand' due to the pale brown fringes to the coverts. At rest, the birds clearly showed 3–4 primaries projecting beyond the tail. The tertials appeared to leave several primaries uncovered and ended well before the tail tip.

Table 1. Records of American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* in western Africa, including Morocco, from north to south.

Tableau 1. Mentions du Pluvier bronzé *Pluvialis dominica* en Afrique de l'Ouest, y compris le Maroc, du nord vers le sud.

Country / Pays	Locality / Localité	Date	Reference / Référence
Morocco	Souss estuary	24–25 April 1997	Thévenot <i>et al.</i> (2003)
	Souss estuary	16–17 May 1999	Thévenot <i>et al.</i> (2003)
Mauritania	PN du Diawling	26 February 2004	This paper
Senegal	Lac de Guier	28 May 1979	Morel & Morel (1990)
Gambia	Fajara, Western Div.	15 January 1984	Gore (1990)
Cape Verde Islands	São Vicente	6 January 1924	Bannerman & Bannerman (1968)
	São Vicente	18 February 1966	Bannerman & Bannerman (1968)
	Santo Antão	26 October 1972	Hazevoet (1995)
	Santiago	5 March 1997	Hazevoet (1998)
	São Vicente	22 January–20 April 1999	Hazevoet (1999)
	São Vicente	14 April 2001	Hazevoet (2003)
	São Vicente	14 November 2001	Hazevoet (2003)
Sierra Leone	Freetown	6–12 November 1973	Field (1974)
Liberia	Zwedru	11–24 December 1981	Gatter (1997)
	Zwedru	8 February–24 March 1983	Gatter (1997)
Côte d'Ivoire	Dabou/Adiopodoume	17 December 1988–2 March 1989	Fishpool & Demey (1991)
	Dabou	14 October 1989	Fishpool & Demey (1991)
Togo	Lomé	19 October 1985	Cheke & Walsh (1996)
São Tomé	Airport	November 1954	Frade & Vieira dos Santos (1977), Christy & Clarke (1998)

Underwing. In flight, the underwings and axillaries were less dark than the upperwing, but appeared slightly darker than the flanks. The primary- and secondary-coverts were concolorous grey. The uncovered area around the primaries and secondaries shafts was pale grey to white. As the outer primaries and secondaries were darker than the underwing-coverts, a narrow whitish wingbar was visible.

Bare parts. Eyes and bill black. The bill was noticeably shorter, thinner and rather more parallel than in Grey Plover, thus lacking the bulbous tip typical of the latter. Leg colour was difficult to ascertain, as only a small part of the tibia was not covered in mud, but appeared dark grey. Although the birds seemed long-legged, the feet did not project beyond the tail in flight.

The birds' dark grey-brown plumage, lacking any pure golden or yellow tones, attenuated rear with a long primary projection and 3–4 primaries projecting beyond the tail, the tertials ending well before the tail tip, the contrasting grey face pattern and striking white supercilium, and fine bill distinguished them from Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* (Alström *et al.* 1991, Svensson *et al.* 1999, Borrow & Demey 2001). Recently, Johnson & Johnson (2004) pointed out the only absolutely reliable characters to separate the two species in

non-breeding plumage. In contrast to the rather short primary projection of Pacific Golden Plover, the long primary projection in American Golden Plover should reach beyond the tail by 12–22 mm and leave 4–5 primaries exposed beyond the longest tertial, as applied in the present case.

Discussion

American Golden Plover breeds in the arctic tundra of northern North America from Alaska east to Baffin Island. It winters in South America from Bolivia south to Patagonia, where adults taking the western flyway arrive around late August to early September. First-year birds move through interior North America and reach the wintering grounds in October. Birds usually leave South America in February/March and arrive at the breeding areas in late May–June (Hayman *et al.* 1986, Snow & Perrins 1998).

Pym (1982), Roselaar (1990) and Golley & Stoddart (1991) provided detailed criteria to distinguish American and Pacific Golden Plovers, resulting in an increasing number of sightings in Europe, where American Golden Plover is now a frequent vagrant with more than 200 records, mostly to the British Isles (e.g. Dymond *et al.* 1989, Dubois & Yésou 1991, Mitchell & Young 1997). The same trend, albeit involving smaller



Figure 1. American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica* with Grey Plover *P. squatarola* (right), Parc national du Diawling, Mauritania, February 2004 (Volker Salewski)

Pluviers bronzés *Pluvialis dominica* avec Pluvier argenté *P. squatarola* (à droite), Parc national du Diawling, Mauritanie, février 2004 (Volker Salewski)

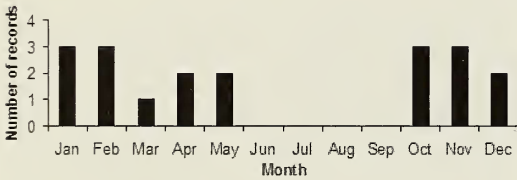


Figure 2. Seasonal occurrence of American Golden Plovers *Pluvialis dominica* in western Africa, including Morocco. Months are those of the first observation date.

Présence saisonnière du Pluvier bronzé *Pluvialis dominica* en Afrique de l'Ouest, y compris le Maroc. Les mois sont ceux de la première date de l'observation.

numbers can be observed in western Africa, including Morocco, where there were only six records prior to 1982, but 13 records since (Table 1).

Fishpool & Demey (1991) reviewed records of golden plovers, i.e. *P. apricaria*, *P. dominica* and *P. fulva*, then known from West Africa. As they point out, the situation at that time was confused due to difficulties in distinguishing the different taxa in the field and because *P. dominica* and *fulva* were treated as a single species ('Lesser Golden Plover'). Several records of 'golden plovers' are therefore now impossible to assign with certainty to species. Table 1 lists all accepted records of American

Golden Plovers in western Africa, including Morocco. We have excluded records of birds 'presumed' to be *P. dominica* or considered to be 'probably' or 'most likely' this species. The latter include records from Ghana (4 October 1977: Grimes 1987), Togo (15 September 1989 and 1–29 March 1990: Cheke & Walsh 1996) and Gabon (26 December 1987 and 3 January 1988: Alexander-Marrack 1992). Although Christy & Clarke (1998) mention that *P. dominica* has been recorded in Gabon and even base the species' description in the relevant account on a bird 'observed in November on the coast of Gabon', no records from that country have been published to date.

Records of American Golden Plovers are exclusively from winter and periods when birds are on passage, with most sightings in February and October (Fig. 2); our record is compatible with these. Four records of birds remaining longer than ten days at the same site are indicative of overwintering in western Africa.

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